

THE DEVELOPMENT
OF
PARTY ORGANIZATION IN IOWA

BY
JOHN W. GANNAWAY



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THE DEVELOPMENT OF PARTY ORGANIZATION IN IOWA

The importance of party organization is but dimly recognized by the average citizen. The part it plays in the working of our governmental system—from the school district to the national government itself—is not generally understood by the great mass of voters in whose loyal adherence it finds its chief support. Though the fact of organization is seen on every hand, the motives which are behind it, the methods used by it, and the results attained through it are not so evident. On the contrary, there is a distinct lack of appreciation of the real significance of these great organizations whose beginnings date back to our first experience as a nation. This unsatisfactory condition is due partly to actual ignorance and partly to the confusion which has arisen from the extreme emphasis placed by many students of politics upon that portion of the party organization which has come to be known popularly as the “machine.” The failure to distinguish properly between the rural party organization and that of the city has added to this confusion. Indeed, the question of rural party organization has been almost wholly neglected, while that of municipal party organization has received extended discussion and has been taken as representative of the organization throughout the entire country. And this is the real situation in spite of the fact that the great majority of our people are members of the rural organizations.

The study of party organization in its larger aspects is a work of the future, but it is a work which must be accomplished before any adequate understanding of our party history and our governmental theory can be attained. A number of points of view will be elucidated in such a study. Among these are: (1) the party organization as the agent of the people in the administration of government in harmonizing the interests of the legislative and executive departments; (2) party organization as a unifying force in the life of the people; (3) the psychology of party organization; (4) the significance of party discipline; (5) the influence of party organization upon the social, educational, and even religious life of the people; (6) the immense power wielded by the organization through the control of party nominations. In addition to these are the well worn questions of the spoils system, the corrupt use of money, and the use of the party machinery to promote the selfish interests of the party managers. In all these different phases the subject of party organization offers opportunities for investigations which will, no doubt, be valuable contributions to our stock of knowledge and throw additional light upon our local and national history.

The following brief account of the beginnings of the party organizations in Iowa is not an attempt to discuss the subject in the manner suggested above, but is simply the foundation for a future study in which the elaboration of these points of view may be undertaken. For the present, it is the purpose to trace the development of party machinery in Iowa from its beginning to its present perfect state. The result will be the outline of the mechanism of our political

parties; their motives and methods are reserved for future consideration.

There are two kinds of party organization, the distinction between which should be made at the outset. There is what may be called the "paper" organization, which may be easily effected; and there is what may be called the "institutional" organization, which has its roots deep in the minds of its members and which requires years for its development. The former is best illustrated by the organizations of the minor parties. A State central committee composed of one member from each congressional district is appointed; a congressional committee composed of one representative from each county is chosen for each congressional district; a similarly constituted committee is selected for each judicial district; and in each county a committee is organized which is composed of representatives from all the townships in the county. The mechanism is complete, but in spite of its completeness is ineffectual because it is artificial in its nature and does not exist in response to the demands of any considerable part of the people. It exists for the most part in the minds of the few men who are its promoters and managers. It is not a great organic party, although it manifests all the outward signs of an organic party. As a matter of fact it is far from possessing this complete machinery—a condition which only emphasizes the radical difference between this imperfect organization and that which is genuinely institutional in its character.

This latter type is illustrated by either of the great parties, but especially by the Democratic party which has behind it a century of unbroken tradition. Its outward

appearance is the same as that of the minor party; its form of organization is the same; and its methods are the same. But it differs from the minor party as the sound nut differs from the empty shell; and it differs in precisely the same manner. The one is a complete organization with that inner vital life which makes it the organic party that it is; the other is the mere outward form—the empty shell. The difference is a psychological one. Men are born into the Democratic party and instinctively become an inherent part of this great mechanism. They unconsciously acquire the *habit* of Democracy, as it were, and act with that party as naturally as they adjust themselves to the social world of which they are a part. It is this institutional organization which has made our great parties live from decade to decade, and has given them the mighty power that is theirs. It is this type of organization which offers to the student of politics a rich field for research and study. An appreciation of this point of view is essential to a correct understanding of party organization in Iowa.

The first settlements in the State were made at a time when Andrew Jackson was at the height of his power. Party discipline had been made effective. The spoils system had but recently been introduced, and the efficiency of thorough organization been made manifest. The early settlers of the Black Hawk Purchase, which was then a part of the Territory of Michigan, were largely from the southern States where party feeling ran high and party lines were rigidly drawn. The instinct for politics was in them. The training for party management was theirs. Naturally one of the first suggestions that came to them after their emigra-

tion to the country west of the Mississippi was their organization as a part of the great national parties to which they belonged. By this means better than any other could their interest in national politics be maintained and the local interests of their new home promoted. But their first efforts at organization were not only the result of a desire to serve the public good; they were a necessity. The germ of party organization was in them, and it could no more help springing into life than can the bud into bloom. Even though the organization at first was very incomplete and far less efficient than it has since become, yet it satisfied the instinctive desire of the Iowa pioneers for party association. They were unable, and indeed had no inclination, to discard their party prejudices and antipathies, and this early organization was a natural outgrowth of their strong party convictions. In other words the consciousness of membership in the two great parties was brought to Iowa by the first settlers, and the local organizations began at once to develop along the lines followed in the States from which they came. The fact that the population was very small and that the influence of the Territory upon the current political opinion was quite imperceptible, was either unthought of or ignored. The first opportunity to draw party lines, and by so doing to furnish the necessity for local organization, was seized with avidity, and used in as effective a manner as the territorial conditions would permit.

This opportunity came in the year 1836 just after the creation by Congress of the Territory of Wisconsin, in which the Iowa District was included. The occasion was the election of the first territorial legislature in which the

Iowa District was represented by eighteen members in the House of Representatives and nine members in the Council.¹ At once after the organization of the Territory and even before the apportionment of the representation to the different counties by Governor Henry Dodge, candidates began to announce themselves and to make appeals to the voters for their support. The only records we have of this first campaign are found in the files of the *Du Buque Visitor*, the first newspaper published within the limits of the Iowa District.² The first reference to the pending campaign is found in the issue of August 10, 1836, in which the following announcements appear. These may be taken as typical of the statements made by the candidates and their friends in announcing their candidacies.

Messrs. Editors:—You will please to insert in your paper, 'that I intend offering myself as a candidate for Constable for this county at the ensuing election.

Yours respectfully,

Durango, 5th July, 1836.

C. KELLER.

Whether Mr. Quigley or his friends were responsible for the second announcement is veiled in mystery.

If Patrick Quigley, Esq. will consent to become a candidate for the Council at the ensuing election, he will be supported by

Du Buque, Aug. 10, 1836.

MANY VOTERS.

The first suggestion as to the need of concerted action in

¹ Of this number Des Moines County was entitled to 7 representatives and 3 councilmen; Iowa County to 6 representatives and 3 councilmen; and Dubuque County to 5 representatives and 3 councilmen.

² Published May 11, 1836, to June 16, 1838. On file in the library of the Historical Department of Iowa, Des Moines.

the nomination of candidates is in a communication from a citizen who signed himself "Voter," which appeared in the issue of the *Du Buque Visitor* of August 17, 1836. He suggested that in order to have every part of the county represented in the legislature, a convention of the citizens of the county should be held at Dubuque or some other suitable point, for the purpose of nominating candidates. This convention, he thought, would give the people an opportunity to become acquainted with one another and with their candidates, insure equal representation to the different parts of the county, and guarantee the capability of the men nominated. This communication brought forth a protest in the issue of the following week, in which it was claimed that the candidates had the right to announce themselves in any civil manner they may choose. A week later a second protest against the plan of calling a caucus appeared. This came from a candidate, who closes his protest with this eloquent defense of the people's character. "This people, this enlightened people revolt at the idea of relinquishing their free right of suffrage into the hands of a few self-important individuals." Two weeks later, in the issue of September 14, "Voter," the originator of this discussion, replied to his critics and argued strongly for the county convention. He takes pains, however, to state his opposition to the "secret caucus system." The following week another citizen, signing himself "A Miner," answered the criticisms of those opposed to the convention and announced a meeting to be held on Saturday, October 1, for the purpose of nominating a candidate for delegate to Congress and candidates for the territorial legislature. It was expected that those who were

striving for the nominations would be present and address the convention.

Thus far the discussion had been carried on by men of both parties, and the effort to secure a convention to nominate candidates acceptable to all the people was an attempt to promote a non-partisan election. It is fair to suppose, and later developments seem to substantiate the claim, that the Whigs, who were greatly in the minority, were largely responsible for this non-partisan plan. But the Democrats, much stronger in numbers than the Whigs, could not endure the thought of seeing men of opposite political faith filling offices which they themselves had power to control. The instinctive feeling of opposition to anyone and anything not in sympathy with the time-honored Democracy, came at once into play. Democrats were of one accord. All desired to see their party supreme in the new Territory. But this desire to control the acts of the legislature, and through them the destiny of the Territory, was due no more to their belief that their party could best serve the interests of the Territory than to their inborn wish to present an unconquerable opposition to their political opponents. Devotion to their party led them to look upon this first campaign as a propitious one in which to effect a local organization. Accordingly, the following call for a convention, which illustrates in an excellent manner the institutional type of party organization, appeared in *The Du Buque Visitor* of September 21, 1836—the issue which contained also the call mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

A CALL.

To the Democrats of Du Buque County.

An important election is about to be held for the choice of Councilmen and Representatives in the Legislative Assembly of this new Territory. At such an important epoch as the first election for legislative officers for this vast scope of country, it is not proper that the Democracy of this county should stand idle. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance. The character of the first Legislative Assembly will have an important bearing upon the future political prospects of the States that will be formed from this Territory. The enemies of the people are always upon the alert. They are always ready and anxious to plant their noxious principles wherever they will take root. Let not the Democracy of the county be stigmatized as too dull to apprehend their rights, or too indolent to maintain them. But, fellow-citizens, be not deceived by hollowhearted professions of friendship. We have been told that all who cry Father! Father! shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven; neither shall all those who cry "Democracy" and "the people" be considered as genuine disciples of Jefferson and Jackson. There are those who, to effect a temporary object, may seem to adopt our principles, although they are at variance with their past conduct. Trust them not; they have clothed themselves with the lion's skin, but elect them to office and they will show by their braying what they are. You hear a great deal said, fellow-citizens, about "no-party,"—that the citizens of this Territory have nothing to say in politics, and that the question should not be raised at the coming election. These are but the arts and snares and stratagems of a wily enemy. Examine the list of candidates offered. How many of them do you recognize as your political friends, who stood by President Jackson in "days of panic," and whose good wishes now are for the success of the Democratic candidates, Van Buren and Johnson? Depend upon it, those who are not for us are against us. "No party men" and "fence men" are always against the Democratic party—and we had better have an open enemy than a pretended friend.

It is well known that a large majority of the citizens of this county are democrats, friends of Jackson and Van Buren, and it is highly important that this majority should have something to say in the choice of public officers. They can only effect their object by union and concert of action among themselves. In union there is strength and victory. But if we permit our enemies to retain the vantage ground which they have assumed—if we suffer our strength to be frittered away by casting our votes in the dark for candidates with whose principles we are unacquainted and without any understanding amongst ourselves, we shall ensure the election of a majority of our political opponents. For the purpose, therefore, of ensuring concert and union among themselves, the Democratic Republicans of Du Buque County are invited to meet at the cabin of Mr. Miller at the mouth of Bee Branch on Cooley, near Samuel Hulitt's, on the 26th day of Sept. (inst) at 10 o'clock A. M. for the purpose of taking the necessary steps preparatory to the next general election in this Territory.

Sept. 19, 1836.

MANY DEMOCRATS.

The convention was held in accordance with this remarkable call, and in the next week's paper appeared an account of the proceedings. The chairman of the convention was W. W. Chapman, who was afterwards the first delegate to Congress from the Territory of Iowa.¹ A committee of eleven was appointed to select the candidates for the ensuing election, and a committee of five to draw up resolutions and an address to the people. Col. George W. Jones was nominated for the office of delegate to Congress, three of the leading citizens of Dubuque for the Council, and four for the House of Representatives.² One vacancy in the list

¹The Territory of Iowa was organized July 3, 1838.

²The candidates nominated for the Council were Stephen Langworthy, John Foley, Thomas McCraney. Those nominated for the House, H. T. Camp, P. H. Engle, Hardin Nowlin, Patrick Quigley.

of candidates for the House was left to be filled by the Democrats from the lower end of the county, who were not represented in the convention. The report of the committee on resolutions expressed great confidence in General Jackson and his administration; considered the election of Van Buren and Johnson as necessary to the country's prosperity; deemed it necessary that the laws of the Territory should be democratic in their features; condemned the acts of their political opponents; and required the candidates of the convention to pledge in writing (the pledges to be published as well) to do all in their power to secure the seat of the territorial government for Dubuque.

Two of the candidates¹ nominated at once prepared and had published long communications in which they accepted the nominations, stating how unworthy they would be if they refused to respond to the wishes of the people, and giving their personal views upon both local and national questions.

In this same issue of the *Visitor*, that of September 28, 1836, appeared a call, signed by "Many Voters," in which the miners and citizens of Dubuque County generally, who were opposed to caucus dictation, were invited to meet at the Methodist church in Dubuque on Saturday, September 31, for the purpose of making arrangements for the coming election. It was expected that the candidates for the legislature would be present and again address the people.

When the day of the election arrived there were seven active candidates for the three positions on the Council, and seventeen candidates for the five places in the House of

¹P. H. Engle and Stephen Langworthy.

Representatives. The Democrats succeeded in electing two of the three candidates for the Council and all four of the candidates nominated for the House.¹ Although no records could be found to give the facts, it is probable that the manner of conducting the campaign and the election in Des Moines and Iowa counties was similar to that used in Dubuque. As compared with the thoroughly organized campaigns of the present day, it was most simple and ineffective. The campaign was almost entirely a personal one in which the candidates themselves took the largest part. In fact, the work of the candidates was practically all that was done to promote the interests of the opposing parties. There were no central committees to direct the campaign and to effect an organization of the party workers for a thorough canvass in the different counties. Several years were to pass by before this feature of the modern party organization was to be adopted.

The death, in the spring of 1837, of one² of the men elected to the House of Representatives, caused a vacancy which was filled at a special election held July 10, 1837. The methods of nominating the candidates and conducting the campaign were similar to those already described. Some of the candidates announced themselves; others were brought forward by admiring friends. Some were nominated in

¹ The number of votes polled in the town of Dubuque was 621, while the vote of the whole county exceeded 1000. Not all the votes, however, in the southern part of the county were polled. It is possible that an earlier election may have been held while Iowa was still a part of Michigan Territory, although no records to this effect were discovered.

² H. T. Camp.

mass conventions in different sections of the county; others came before the people without this formality and without the prestige which accompanied a convention nomination. All the candidates made use of the columns of the newspaper to communicate with the voters. Each one used whatever methods he deemed most effectual. A campaign more picturesque than that conducted by the modern smoothly and silently working machine, was the inevitable result. Men were just as eager for office then as now; just as willing to sacrifice themselves to the call of public duty; but the science of political management had not then been developed to its present state of perfection.

In 1838 the territorial government of Iowa was established and an election of a territorial legislature was called for September 10th. At once party politics took on a more aggressive appearance, although party lines were not generally observed in the first and second elections—those of 1838 and 1839. In these first elections members of the legislature and delegates to Congress were the only officers chosen, and the Territory being so new, questions of purely local interest prevented the division of the voters upon strictly party lines. But in 1840 the whole situation was changed. Political enthusiasm ran high. The spirit of the great presidential campaign in the States pervaded the whole Territory.

During the two or three years preceding the campaign of 1840, large numbers of new settlers had come to Iowa, bringing with them strong party convictions and an enthusiasm greatly excited by the coming presidential election. Iowa could have no part in that election, but that was no

reason why the followers of Harrison and Van Buren should be idle. The hereditary party feeling was too strong to permit of an inactive campaign. The result was that for the most part the legislature was elected by a party vote, the Democrats securing a small majority in both houses. In some of the eighteen counties which existed then, the county seat question and other considerations of a local nature prevented this strict party division. The Whigs seem to have lost more than the Democrats by defections of this kind. But even in these counties the minority party was so aggressive that it was necessary to look after the interests of the majority with the utmost care. This intensity of party feeling was strengthened by the efforts of the Democrats during the summer of 1840 to effect an organization of the Democratic supporters throughout the Territory. Many Democrats were opposed to this movement, but the promoters of the plan arranged for a territorial convention, which met at Bloomington (Muscatine) August 19, and nominated General A. C. Dodge for the office of delegate to Congress. The convention was not a large one, and was gotten up in a very informal manner. It was, however, the first attempt at party organization for the whole Territory, and as such is of peculiar interest to the student of this period. The editor of the *Territorial Gazette and Advertiser*,¹ published at Burlington, referred to the nomination of General Dodge in 1840 in these words:

The nomination of General Dodge by the democracy was the first step that had ever been publicly taken in the Territory towards a

¹ Editorial in issue of June 26, 1841. File of *Territorial Gazette and Advertiser* at the library of the Historical Department, Des Moines.

distinct party organization. A very respectable minority resisted the drawing of party lines as impolitic and out of time; and although the majority of such in the end fell in with and supported the nomination, it is well known that there are some who refused to do so.

During the closing days of the campaign the Democratic leaders urged on the work of organization. As it became more and more evident that the Whig nominees on the national ticket would be elected, the zeal of the Democrats became more intense, with the result that they saved the day and elected General Dodge by a small majority.

When the legislature met in the fall both houses were organized on party lines, with the Democrats in control—a circumstance which tended to increase the already intense party feeling and gave a marked impetus to the work of organization. The actual control of the legislature gave the Democrats a knowledge of their strength; the fact that the Democratic majority in each house was very small made the Whigs see the possibilities that lay behind an effective party organization. The result was a greater activity among the rank and file of both parties, and a closer feeling of kinship among the party leaders in the legislature. It is a significant fact that the division of the parties in the legislature was due largely to a question of patronage. The question whether the legislative printing should be given to the *Hawkeye* or to the *Gazette*—the official organs of the Whig and Democratic parties respectively—was the cause of this division and was a bone of contention during the entire session.

The failure of several Democratic legislators, who were elected by the aid of the Whigs, to abide by their ante-elec-

tion promises that they would oppose the organization of the legislature upon party lines, gave great encouragement to the work of organization among the Whigs. The Burlington *Hawkeye and Patriot*, edited by James G. Edwards, a stalwart Whig, did valiant service for the party in its advocacy of concerted action. In the issue of November 12, the editor "trusts that all the Whigs in this territory will have an eye upon a thorough organization of the Harrison party before winter closes." Three weeks later there appeared an editorial on *Organization* in which it was urged that the Whigs should follow the Democrats in effecting an organization of the party throughout the territory. It was suggested that if a general meeting of the Whigs could not be held in some suitable place, steps should be taken at once to insure active and harmonious efforts in the interest of the party in the different counties. It was proposed that a general jubilee to celebrate the election of General Harrison to the presidency might be held at Burlington while the legislature was still in session, and that the plans for the organization of the party might then be adopted. But if this was inconvenient, a "Territorial Corresponding Committee" should be appointed who should correspond with such persons in each county as were recommended by the Whig members of the Legislature. These men should be instructed to call county meetings where the issues between Harrison and Van Buren should be discussed. In this way the Whigs could be united and victory assured.

Four weeks later, December 31, there appeared a call, signed by William B. Ewing and Henry W. Starr, for a meeting of the friends of William Henry Harrison through-

out the Territory to be held at Burlington, January 6, 1841. Although the time for circulating the notice of the meeting was very short, a goodly number of prominent Whigs from different parts of the Territory assembled at the appointed time. The meeting was held in the Methodist church and was presided over by R. P. Lowe of Bloomington. After a committee had been authorized to draw up a congratulatory address to General Harrison, resolutions to the following effect were adopted:—That the meeting should proceed to the organization of the Democratic Whig party, for the Territory of Iowa, with a view to produce a union and concert of action in regard to its interests and duties; that a central committee¹ to consist of five members from Des Moines county and one member from each of the remaining counties should be appointed; and that the meeting should recommend to the Whig voters in the several counties that they organize and appoint county committees and unite their influence with that of their fellow-citizens in an endeavor to produce a harmony of feeling and a zealous coöperation in every honorable effort to ensure success to the Democratic Whigs of Iowa in their future proceedings. In

¹ The central committee chosen in accordance with these resolutions was composed of the following persons: Henry W. Starr, J. P. Bradstreet, James G. Edwards, J. D. Learned, W. B. Ewing, all from Des Moines county; Stephen Whicher, Jr. of Muscatine; G. C. R. Mitchell of Scott; Hamilton Robb of Henry; Horace Smith of Johnson; Daniel F. Miller of Lee; George H. Walworth of Jones; Isaac N. Lewis of Van Buren; Francis Springer of Louisa; James Crawford of Dubuque; Robert C. Bourne of Clinton; J. K. Moss of Jackson; Dr. J. S. Waugh of Jefferson; A. Cowles of Linn; S. P. Higginson of Cedar; Lemuel G. Collins of Washington; Quigley, P. M. of Clayton.

a second resolution it was voted to recommend the holding of a convention at Davenport on May 5, for the purpose of nominating a candidate for delegate to Congress, and to instruct the central and county committees to report at that time the progress that may have been made in organizing the party throughout the Territory. It was also voted that the Central Committee should instruct the county committees, and through them the people, to hold primary meetings at which delegates to the Davenport convention should be chosen. The representation in this convention was twice as many delegates for each electoral district, of which there were ten, as it had representatives in the legislature.

At once the Whigs began the work of organization throughout the Territory. The same form of organization was adopted in all the counties by the conventions called for that purpose. The proceedings in Louisa county were typical of those in all the counties. Here a mass convention was held January 6, 1841, for the purpose of selecting delegates to the territorial convention, of choosing a County Central Committee, and of perfecting plans for the local organization. A committee was appointed to submit a list of delegates to the convention and a list of persons to constitute the county committee. This committee was made up of one person from each township. Resolutions were adopted to the effect that, as vigilance and a perfect organization are the only means of preserving and perpetuating the principles of democracy, it should be recommended to the Whigs of each township to organize immediately by the formation of township committees of vigilance,

and by the adoption of such other measures as might be deemed expedient. The members of the County Committee were authorized to call meetings in their respective townships for these purposes. The County Committee was also authorized to call a convention at which candidates for all the county offices should be nominated. The resolutions also advocated thorough organization throughout the Territory and pledged the support of Louisa County to the candidate of the Davenport convention. Particular emphasis was laid upon the necessity of supporting the party ticket. It was the claim of the Whigs that they had the numerical strength to carry the Territory, and this could easily be done if all would unite upon a candidate and support him at the polls. The result was that in all these first county conventions the members pledged themselves to support the convention nominees and to discourage the running of independent candidates. Township meetings were held as recommended, vigilance committees appointed, and plans adopted for an effective campaign.

Similar plans were adopted in the other counties, and by the time of the Davenport convention the Whigs of the Territory had been pretty thoroughly aroused. The convention assembled May 5. All of the counties were represented except Dubuque and Clayton. The delegates from these counties were unable to attend because of the bad condition of the roads, resulting from heavy rains. The object of the convention was to nominate a candidate for delegate to Congress. After a brief and friendly contest Alfred Rich of Lee County was made the nominee. The Central Committee, appointed at Burlington, was instructed to

report to the people an address suitable to the approaching election. It was recommended to the counties that they hold conventions for the purpose of nominating full Democratic Whig tickets for the legislature and county offices, and that they discountenance the claims of all who would not submit to such arrangements. As an incentive for aggressive work it was voted to present a banner to the county giving the largest Whig majority for delegate to Congress.

In the meantime the Democrats were putting forth equally energetic efforts to unify the interests and organize the forces of the Democracy. After the election of 1840 it was borne in upon the Democrats that they held the Territory by a very narrow margin, and that unless they did organize the Whigs would soon have control. This feeling was greatly intensified by the success of the Whigs in effecting an organization at their jubilee meeting January 6, 1841. Indeed so urgent did the necessity for organization seem, that only eight days after the Whig meeting a similar meeting of the Democratic legislators and the Democracy of Burlington was held for the purpose of starting the work of organization throughout the Territory. They urged the Democrats of the different counties to adopt effectual measures for a thorough and efficient organization of the party, without which defeat would be inevitable. In the last three sections of their resolutions, their belief was expressed that the organization they desired could be best promoted and perfected by township, county, and territorial conventions; and the holding of such conventions was recommended in order that the nominations for the various offices might be made by the people themselves and not by a few active and inter-

ested parties. They recommended also the holding of a territorial convention at Iowa City on the first Monday in June for the purpose of nominating a delegate to Congress. It was voted further to request the Democratic electors of each county to nominate full county tickets and to discountenance the pretensions of all other aspirants of their own party. It was also decided that a Central Committee¹ to consist of five members from Des Moines County and committees of correspondence to consist of one member from each remaining county should be appointed, and that it should be recommended to the voters to organize county committees and to unite their influence with that of their political friends in an effort to produce a harmony of feeling and a zealous coöperation in every honorable effort to ensure success to the Democratic party in all its future proceedings.

The plan thus adopted was exactly the same as that adopted by the Whigs the week before, notwithstanding the Democrats of Burlington had ridiculed it at that time. In fact the resolution providing for the appointment of a Central Committee was taken almost word for word from that of their political opponents. Likewise, the plans fol-

¹ The Central Committee chosen was as follows: Stephen Gearhart, John Johnson, George Hepner, James M. Morgan, J. W. Woods, all from Des Moines County; John Carns of Van Buren; Sullivan S. Ross of Jefferson; William Thompson of Henry; Thomas Baker of Washington; Samuel C. Trowbridge of Johnson; James W. Isett of Louisa; Edward E. Fay of Muscatine; Harman Van Antwerp of Cedar; Andrew Logan of Scott; Samuel R. Murray of Clinton; John G. McDonald of Jackson; Thomas McCraney of Dubuque; Frederick Andross of Clayton; John C. Berry of Linn; Thomas Denson of Jones.

lowed out in the work of organizing the counties were similar to those already described as being used by the Whigs. They provided for the holding of primary township meetings for the purpose of appointing township committees and devising plans for a more complete organization; for the appointment of delegates to the county conventions, at which full tickets should be nominated and a county central committee chosen; and for the selection of delegates to the territorial convention—each county to send twice as many delegates as it had representatives in the legislature.

As in the case of the Whigs, the party workers responded nobly to this call, enthusiastic meetings were held, and local tickets nominated, so that by the time June arrived the Democracy of Iowa was ready for the territorial convention and the vigorous campaign that was to follow. In this work of local organization great care was taken to impress upon the voters the need of supporting the party ticket at all times and under all circumstances. Each party claimed that the other was raising the “no-party” cry in order to mislead the critics, while at the same time it was secretly perfecting its own organization. But this was merely a campaign cry. Both parties, as expressed in their leading newspapers, were anxious for a strict party division; and they hoped to bring this object about by their thorough organization.

The Democratic territorial convention assembled at Iowa City at the time designated in the call. There were one hundred and fifty delegates present, representing all the counties except Scott and Clinton. General A. C. Dodge was renominated for the office of delegate to Congress, and

plans were made for an aggressive campaign. In the election that followed the Democratic candidate was successful by a majority of 513.

Our present political machines, which work so perfectly and effectually, are the evolutionary product of this early organization. The mechanism has remained the same. The form of the organization is unchanged, but its spirit and methods are entirely different. The evolution which has gone on has not resulted in the invention of new machinery, but in the perfection of that which already existed. This evolution, of course, was more rapid in the older counties. In the newer counties the work of organization gradually developed as the population increased and the importance of the local political units became greater. But in none of the counties was the organization made complete from the first. The work of establishing the county machine, with all its representatives in every township and school district, was slow, and for many years was attended with only partial success.

The institutional party was brought to Iowa by the first settlers, and the first organizations were due to their instinctive desire for party association and for affiliation with the parties in the States from which they had come. But as the Territory developed and the time drew near for her admission into the Union, the interest of each party in its organization was greatly intensified by the further desire to see the new State organized under its own supervision, and the policy of the new Commonwealth under its own control. The struggle over the question of holding a State constitutional convention, and the difficulty of secur-

ing the adoption of the Constitution after the admission of the State had been agreed to, were largely due to this contest for party supremacy. The tightening of party lines and attempts at party discipline were the natural result. A great impetus was given to the work of organization in both parties.

The advent of the slavery question into Iowa politics gave a second and even greater impetus to party activity. Although it meant, eventually, the division of one party and the dissolution of the other no change in the form of their organizations was due to its introduction. The Democratic party was inclined to be pro-slavery in its sympathies although many of its members were opposed to slavery extension and united with the Whigs in 1856 to organize the new Republican party. The Whigs were largely anti-slavery men, and, as the interest in the subject grew, were able to increase their strength until, in 1854, under the leadership of James W. Grimes they for the first time elected their State ticket. Opposition to Douglas's Nebraska Bill was the keynote of this campaign, and carried the State for the Whigs by nearly two thousand majority. The following year, with a total vote which had been increased by only five hundred, they were able to carry the State a second time by a majority greater by three thousand than that of 1854.

During these two years a new alignment of the parties was being made in most of the northern States. The opponents of slavery extension were coming together upon this single issue and organizing the Republican party to make their opposition effective. This movement met with

a cordial response from the anti-slavery people of Iowa. Immediately after the election of 1855 the plans for the organization of the Republican party were made, and by the first of the next year the time was ripe for a public announcement. In the issue of January 14, 1856, of the *Muscatine Journal* is found the following call which was written by Governor Grimes, although that fact was not made known at the time.¹

TO THE CITIZENS OF IOWA.

Believing that a large majority of the people of Iowa are opposed to the political principles of the present administration, and to the introduction of slavery into the territory now free, and also that made free by the compromise of 1820; and that the party, styling itself the "Democratic party," are striving to make slavery a great national institution, contrary to the principles laid down in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, as taught by the fathers of the Republic; we would call upon all such free citizens to meet in convention, at Iowa City on the 22nd of February, for the purpose of organizing a Republican party, to make common cause with a similar party already formed in several other states of the Union.

Jan. 3rd, 1856.

MANY CITIZENS.

The other Whig papers published the call, and at once the work of organization began in all parts of the State.

¹In the same issue of the *Muscatine Journal* is found this editorial comment upon the call for the Republican convention. "Papers friendly to the above call will give it a publication in their columns, and urge upon their countrymen the importance of a representation in said convention. It will hardly be expected that a large delegation will be in attendance; but then, those who do go should be good men and true." File of *Muscatine Journal*, in the library of the Historical Department, Des Moines.

Mass and delegate conventions were held in all the counties, and representatives chosen to the Iowa City convention. Great enthusiasm prevailed. Democrats of long standing united with their old-time political opponents in this effort against the extension of slavery into the territories. The convention, which assembled on February 22, 1856, more than satisfied the friends of the movement. The *Muscatine Journal* speaks of it in these words:

It was the largest, most intelligent and enthusiastic ever convened in the state. The old settlers who have attended all the political conventions of the state since its organization, were unanimous in the opinion above expressed. Democrats who thronged the lobbies and aisles of the chamber during the session of the convention, frankly admitted that it never had its equal in point of numbers or ability in Iowa. We noticed one fact indicative of the character of the newcomers to this state, that the ablest speeches were delivered by those who have not resided within our borders over two years. The "old stagers" who have heretofore controlled, and we might say moulded, all the state conventions to suit themselves, found in this convention a growth of young giants who overpowered them in many a well fought encounter and placed themselves side by side with the best intellects of the state. This was a most refreshing evidence of the sincerity of the mass. Every member of the convention thought for himself, and subscribed to the dictation of no other, and hence the honesty and integrity of the members, and the value of their proceedings.

Four hundred delegates from all parts of the State were in attendance. Philip Velie of Lee County was made chairman, and J. T. Lane, N. M. Hubbard, J. B. Stewart and C. C. Nourse were elected secretaries. Committees, consisting of one member from each county—thirty-nine in all

—were appointed to draw up resolutions and to choose candidates for State officers, presidential electors, and delegates to the national convention. Only one issue was considered in the resolutions as adopted—that of opposition to slavery extension. In addition to the resolutions, there was issued an address to the people prepared by a committee of which Hon. J. B. Grinnell was chairman and Samuel J. Kirkwood and William M. Stone, future Governors of the State, were members.

The organization adopted by the Republicans was the same in form as that of the Democrats and Whigs. A State Central Committee¹ of five members was appointed. A committee of five in each of the two Congressional districts was chosen. County committees composed of representatives from all the townships were organized. Mass conventions were held, and every opportunity seized to make clear the issues between the two parties.

This organization was as much institutional in its character as that of either of the two parties from which its members were drawn. The instinct for organization was in them as in the first settlers of the State and the experience gained in the many heated contests between the Democrats and the Whigs gave them a knowledge of practical politics which was invaluable to them in the great campaign about to be waged in the cause of liberty. Their great success in this cause was due to the fact that their ability to use party

¹ The members of this first Republican State Central Committee were as follows: A. J. Stevens of Polk county; J. P. Grantham of Henry; W. E. Miller of Johnson; John Casady of Poweshiek; and S. M. Ballard of Audubon.

organization was reinforced by a profound conviction upon a great moral as well as upon a political question. To them the fate of the Republic hung in the balance, and their zeal for party supremacy was increased immeasurably by their championship of human rights. Furthermore the movement for the new party was a movement among the masses of the people and not among the political leaders alone. Otherwise it could not have developed into the great organic party, which it now is.

As the summer of 1856 passed and the election day drew near, the Republican organization became more efficient and more complete, until, in the minds of its members, it was almost irresistible. It won a sweeping victory in the election, and proved in an effective manner its inherent power.

In the *Dubuque Republican* of November 26, 1856, is the following statement which expresses in a few words the feeling of the leaders of the new party:

The Republican party of Iowa is now fully organized, and holds within its hands the destinies of the State. The Executive, Judiciary, and both branches of the legislature are Republican, and the convention to revise the Constitution of the State has a strong working Republican majority.

The foregoing is a brief account of the beginnings of party organization in Iowa. As has already been suggested, our present great organizations are the outgrowth of these early attempts at party management. There has been a continuous development from that time to this. But this development has not altered the outward form of the organization. The State, the congressional districts, the judicial districts, the counties, and the townships are still the basis

of its existence. A division of labor among the respective committees is still the rule of procedure. But the motive that controls the organization, and the methods by which its work is accomplished, are very different.

No greater mistake can be made by the student of this question than to carry the present conceptions of party management and machine politics into his study of this early period. The abnormal features of present day politics had not then developed. The idea of a State Central Committee practically controlling the policies of the State did not then prevail. There was no conception of an all-powerful political "machine" in our modern sense—an inner organization whose interests are often, if not always antagonistic to those of the great party it is supposed to represent. The party system in this State at that time was the normal one. The two great parties held within their ranks practically all the people of the State. The voters in each party were in a real sense members of its organization. There was no organization apart from the great mass of voters. In fact it was their organization, and theirs alone. The committees were *their* representatives; the responsibilities of the campaign were *their* burden; and its success was *their* glory. To-day the situation is very different. The great mass of voters have very little to say in determining the policies of the parties; they have even less to say concerning their management. The importance of the individual voter, except as he counts on election day, has greatly diminished; the importance of the party manager has greatly increased.

The change that has taken place since the Civil War is illustrated by the difference in the manner of conducting the

campaigns. In the early days there were no attempts at regulating nominations by law. There was no primary system, and at first few party rules to be observed. For the first years anyone could stand as a candidate for any office to which he aspired. Later the parties succeeded almost entirely in preventing the candidacies of all except the party nominees. Independent candidates became exceptional. But during all the time the campaign methods were simplicity itself as compared with the complicated procedure of the present. The personal canvass made by the candidates was the principal means of stirring party enthusiasm and of influencing public opinion. A joint debate between rival candidates occasionally enlivened a campaign. No accurate knowledge of the party's strength could be ascertained before the election. Except the circular letters published in the newspapers the candidates made very little use of campaign literature. A speech was sometimes printed in pamphlet form, but this was rare. The public rally and newspaper were the most successful and the most common methods of reaching the people. The party committees filled a subordinate place in the early campaigns. Their principal work was to arrange for the necessary conventions; to prepare an occasional address to the people; and to assist the different communities in effecting their local organizations. The brunt of the battle was met by the candidates themselves, and the direction of the campaign was largely in their hands.

Later years have made it necessary to surround the making of nominations with legal restrictions. Nomination papers must be filed with the Secretary of State. The print-

ing and marking of ballots are regulated by law. Party rules have become many. It is no longer possible for any man to stand as a candidate. He must first gain the consent of the party managers, and then secure the approval of his party associates at their primary meetings. The part which the party managers now take in making nominations is very different from that which they took in the period under discussion. Then, the committees were simply the agents of the voters and had no more influence in determining the nomination of candidates than the rank and file. Now, through the influence of patronage, contributions for campaign expenses, allotment of campaign and public printing, the selection of places for the holding of conventions, and other means, the central committees are supreme, and have it in their power to secure the nomination of almost anyone whom they may wish to favor.

But the methods of conducting the campaign itself have also greatly changed. The personal work of the candidates is no longer the controlling factor in the campaign. Its supervision is entirely in the hands of the State committee. Vast sums of money are used each year to distribute great quantities of campaign literature, and to hire campaign speakers. Every ward and school district in the State has its committeeman, and through him a thorough canvass is made. In a few days' time the State committee can know the party preference of every voter in the State. The work progresses smoothly and quickly, each part of the machine doing its own work and contributing its full share to the final result. The influence of the machine is felt everywhere, and in fact is predominant in the politics of the State.

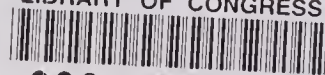
In this State, as in other States and in the nation as a whole, this predominance of the party managers—the bosses—furnishes the great problem in our politics. To some the party boss is the natural product of the party system. To others his existence is due to abnormal conditions and influences. To all his power is a source of danger and brings home to the student of present day politics the need of careful investigation into the source of this power—the party organization.

That the party organizations have rendered service of great value to the State and nation cannot be questioned. In the early days of the State, when communication was difficult and communities were jealous of one another, the party organizations did more than any other cause to prevent sectional feelings. They united the interests of the people and brought them together in a common purpose and a common task. And this influence has been at work ever since. The fact that the great Democratic party never became a sectional party during the dark days of the Rebellion, but remained in a true sense a national party, made the task of bringing the North and the South into genuine fellowship immeasurably easier than it otherwise would have been. That the party organizations have also fostered evils of the greatest consequence is equally true—a fact which only emphasizes the importance of the subject, and makes plain the duty of faithful study and a conscientious use of the facts discovered.

JOHN W. GANNAWAY

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